

EXHIBIT 1



In a 'forgotten' corner of Needham, abandoned homes blight a neighborhood

By Stefan Geller

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Take a drive through the heart of Needham and you will see a town full of picturesque homes and well-manicured lawns. A new restaurant seems to open every month and local officials are currently working on numerous multi-million-dollar projects to renovate and improve the town.

But, as you drive across Route 128 on Highland Avenue and find yourself in the small section of Needham that remains before the Newton border, that charming scene fades away.

"For over 20 years I've been cleaning up this neighborhood because of other people's neglect. I'm 85 years old and I cannot do it any longer. I've asked the town to do something about it, but they ignore me," said Nina Prohodski, a resident living on Riverside Street, a block away from the border with Newton.

For Prohodski and the other residents living across Route 128, their displacement from the core of Needham has left them in a proverbial no-man's-land tucked between office buildings and the Charles on Riverside Street. They fall inside the town's borders but are far enough away from the majority that their needs are given the least attention.

The result is a community of residents that feels forgotten by the town.

"It feels like the town wishes we'd go away. They don't do anything," Prohodski said. "They spend millions of dollars on swimming pools or to make Needham look beautiful. How about us?"

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Abandoned Homes

Prohodski owns several houses along Riverside Street that she rents out to tenants, but across the same street are five homes that no one has lived in for 20 years. Trash bags, cat food cans, beer bottles and other kinds of trash have piled up along them, which Prohodski says continually get blown across the street onto her properties, leaving her to clean them up.

"My neighbors are afraid to come out at night because the raccoons and skunks are on their front stairs. It happens to me all the time," she said. "I pay over \$40,000 a year in taxes to the town, but I have to live with this? It's not fair."

According to Timothy McDonald, director of the Needham Public Health Department, the town has been working for several years to try to get the owner of the houses to sell the properties, but have repeatedly run into obstacles.

They have issued numerous letters to the owner, ordering him clean up or face fines. However, because he doesn't have enough money to pay, that method fails to make a lasting difference. They've tried to condemn the houses as unsafe for human habitation, but have been unable to because he doesn't have any tenants. And because he has no close family, they can't force him to go elsewhere.

"I feel for the people in that neighborhood, because it's very frustrating. Especially because they have to put up with very unsightly homes," McDonald said. "The guy just doesn't want to sell."

McDonald said that they have been working with Attorney General Maura Healey's office to address the problem, which did help them flip another abandoned property on Highland Terrace, but there is still work to be done.

Ignored by officials

The abandoned homes are not the only issue that Prohodski said makes her feel forgotten; the roads are in disrepair, the street lights don't work properly and the town regularly fails to respond to problems that arise in a timely manner, she said.

Prohodski first moved to Needham in 1954 and said the feeling of abandoned from the town has been a constant ever since.

"My husband's mother fought the town tooth and nail all the time to give attention to the people down here. It did nothing," Prohodski said. "I don't want the town to look the other way and say, 'this is good enough for them down there.' It's not right and it's not fair."

Prohodski said she has repeatedly reached out to the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Health, the Department of Public Works and the Planning Board, but none of them have been able to help.

"I would hope that they would send some men to clean up the garbage," Prohodski said. "I want this neighborhood to be treated like every other neighborhood in Needham."

While Prohodski insisted that the community doesn't receive enough attention from the town, Selectman John Bulian said that he doesn't believe that that's the case.

"I understand their feeling of isolation in a certain respect, because clearly you have a small neighborhood tucked away. I understand that people over there feel as though they've been forgotten, but the town has always given a great deal of attention there," he said. "I have always tried to be responsive to [Prohodski] and others in that neighborhood and I will continue to do so."

"Nina is absolutely entitled to all of the services that the town should be providing and does provide to her neighborhood," Bulian said.